

John Calvin Stevens House
52 Bowdoin Street
(south side of street)
Portland
Cumberland County
Maine

HABS No. ME-137

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
801 - 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

JOHN CALVIN STEVENS HOUSE

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Location: 52 Bowdoin Street (south side of street), Portland,
Cumberland County, Maine.

Present Owner: William W. Alcorn and Mary Elizabeth J. Alcorn.

Present Occupant: William W. Alcorn and family

Present Use: Dwelling

Statement of
Significance: House was built in 1884 in the "shingle style" by
the Portland architect John Calvin Stevens, 1855-
1940, as his own residence and has an early example
of revived use of the gambrel roof.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an in-
complete chain of title to the land on which the structure
stands. Reference is the office of the Recorder of Deeds,
Cumberland County.

1884 Deed November 15, 1884 recorded November 15, 1884 in
Book 512 page 208 (lot - no mention of building)
Ashbel Chaplin and William T. Small
to
John Calvin Stevens

1896 Deed July 23, 1896 recorded July 24, 1896 in Book 639
page 197
John Calvin Stevens
to
Martha Louise Stevens (wife)

1919 Deed April 30, 1919 recorded May 1, 1919 in Book 1021
page 280
Martha Louise Stevens
to
Marion P. Emerson

1963 Deed September 27, 1963 recorded September 27, 1963 in
Book 2777 page 365
Trustees of estate of Marion P. Emerson
to
William W. Alcorn and Mary Elizabeth J. Alcorn (wife)

2. Date of erection: Built 1884-85. Stevens bought vacant site late in 1884 and is first listed at 52 Bowdoin Street in 1885 (Portland, Maine Directories).
3. Architect, builder, suppliers etc.: John Calvin Stevens, 1855-1940; cost, \$5,000.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: A perspective view with inset first-floor sketch plan was published in The American Architect and Building News, Vol. XVI, No. 469 (December 20, 1884). (The same perspective without inset plan was published as plate VII in Stevens and Cobb, op. cit., and reproduced in Vincent J. Scully, The Shingle Style (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), ill. 86.) First and second-floor plans (together with interior vignettes) are shown on plate VIII, Stevens and Cobb, op. cit. Floor plans, elevations, and a cross-section drawn for alterations and additions made in 1905 are in the architectural office of the builder's grandson, John Calvin Stevens, 1908- , 127 Prospect Street, Portland, Main 04101.
5. Alterations and additions: In 1905 library projecting south of original rear plane of house was added, replacing open porch in southwest angle formed by outer walls of original dining room and pantry. One-story roofed open porch projecting in pentagonal bay was built on west side of new library. On second floor, new chamber with oriel on south wall was added over new library. A new chimney served fireplaces in library and chamber. Southeast chamber was enlarged toward south. Finished attic chamber above new chamber with oriel continuing into attic, and new east and west attic dormers, were also added in 1905.

At an undetermined date after 1905, main (north) entrance was abolished, and new main entrance with roofed rectangular open porch was opened on west side into former dining room. Original front (north) porch was enclosed, and north and east walls of former den were removed to form enlarged room now used as dining room. Den fireplace was eliminated. Original pantry was made into closet, and new pantry-passage projecting in three-sided bay behind stairway was built on east wall. Original front vestibule and hall were enclosed and added to new pantry space between stairway and former front porch area now added to former den. New doorway south of central chimney was cut from former dining room to kitchen. Porch west of library was glassed in.

On second floor, space formerly occupied by attic stairs and closet was added to northeast chamber. Closet on

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west wall of northwest chamber was eliminated. New attic stairs rising west in straight flight were built in space formerly occupied by linen closet and two chamber closets. Doorway was opened between northwest chamber and upstairs sitting room (middle room on west side). Second bathroom and closet were built between sitting room and southwest chamber which had been added in 1905. Door from sitting room to southeast chamber was closed, and new doorway was opened between southwest and southeast chambers. In attic, closets were built between northeast and northwest rooms. A bathroom was built between central chimney and south room. Space between new stairs and bathroom was enclosed to form another room on west side.

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6. Important old views: Perspective published in American Architect, Stevens and Cobb, and Scully, op. cit.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Residence of noted Portland architect, John Calvin Stevens, from 1885 to 1919.

C. Supplemental Material:

The architect's description of his house, 1889.

"The house shown in Plates VII-VIII is located on the high land of the Western Promenade at Portland. The first story is of brick, which protrude here and there at random, giving dots of shadow playful in their effect. Above the brick work the walls are shingled. Creeping vines and stately hollyhocks help make the summer aspect of the house enticing, even to a disinterested /sic! / spectator.

"Within, the rooms are varied in treatment. The Hall and Den are finished in white-wood, deepened slightly in color. The Den walls are swept haphazard with burnt sienna, here deep, there lighter. The ceiling is light blue. The Parlor has woodwork painted ivory white, with a figured paper of deep gray-buff; the ceiling being light olive brown. In the Dining room all woodwork is stained a deep mahogany. This room is finished with a dado some five feet high, the wall above the dado being colored with burnt sienna, deep and uniform in tone; ceiling gray olive. The rooms in second story are papered, the woodwork being pine, shellacked"

/Stevens and Cobb, op. cit., unnumbered page opposite Plate VII./

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D. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Cumberland County Registry of Deeds, 142 Federal Street, Portland, Maine 04112. Plans in office of John Calvin Stevens (architect grandson of designer), 127 Prospect Street, Portland, Maine 04101. Interview (1965) with John Calvin Stevens. Correspondence (1967) with Mr. and Mrs. William W. Alcorn (present owners and occupants), 52 Bowdoin Street, Portland, Maine 04102 and Seward R. Thompson, Register of Cumberland County.
2. Secondary and published sources: The American Architect and Building News, Vol. XVI, No. 469 (December 20, 1884). John Calvin Stevens and Albert Winslow Cobb, Examples of American Domestic Architecture (New York: William T. Comstock, 1889). Portland, Maine Directories, 1883 ff. Vincent J. Scully, Jr., The Shingle Style (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).

Prepared by Martha Kingsbury
Research Assistant
National Park Service
August, 1965
and Denys Peter Myers
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
May, 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The John Calvin Stevens house, designed in 1881, is a brick and shingled gambrel-roofed structure of informal, but not rambling, plan. The roof is the most distinguishing feature and gives the house its cozily domestic appearance.
2. Condition of fabric: Extensively remodelled but well-maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Approximately 40' x 57' (including projections), modified rectangular plan, two-and-a-half stories, two-bay facade.
2. Foundations: Brick masonry on hardpan.

3. Wall construction: First floor, rustic red brick; second floor (embraced by steep lower slope of gambrel roof), gray wooden shingles. HABS ME 3-PORT 17-
4. Framing: Standard light frame construction with wooden studs, joists and rafters.
5. Porches: Original front (north) porch has been enclosed and added to interior. Main entrance (west) porch is open, one step above grade, and has flat roof supported by posts at outer corners. One-story porch projecting in pentagonal bay (southwest corner) has pentagonal sloping roof supported by posts at angles of parapet wall, was originally open, is now glazed in. Small open rear entrance porch (southeast corner) has hipped roof supported by two posts above parapet walls. Recessed loggia on second floor (west) has parapet rail and is flanked by windowed walls at forty-five degree angles to west wall plane. Rear wall of loggia is parallel with parapet. Loggia roof sweeps down between dormer gables to level of second-floor window lintels.
6. Chimneys: Three brick chimneys have rounded-brick corners below square flue openings facing east-west. Flat capping slabs span flues and project very slightly. Front chimney straddles roof ridge, center chimney is tangent to east face of ridge, and south chimney is slightly east of ridge.
7. Openings:
- a. Doorways and doors: Wooden main (west) door has simple wooden architrave molding. Wooden rear (south) door has four horizontal panels. Matchboard basement door with small rectangular light is in pent-roofed projection on south wall and opens at grade level.
- b. Windows and shutters: Windows vary considerably in size and muntin patterns, which range from twenty-four-over-two-light to two-over-one-light. Some windows are single; others are grouped in pairs or triads. All have wooden sash, and all except smallest are double-hung. First-floor windows have stone sills. Center window of triad at northwest corner is chamfered at forty-five degree angle and overhung by triangular soffit of second floor. Library window on south wall is broad, shallow three-sided oriel set under overhang of second floor. Shallow two-sided two-story oriel beginning at second floor on south wall has apex on axis with center-line of house. Two small square attic windows in north gable have square panel with bas-relief of asymmetrical swirling foliage between

them. No shutters, but pintles remain at several windows.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gambrel roof, ridge running north-south, with subsidiary (east-west) cross gables of attic dormers at height of main ridge. Covering, originally wooden shingles, is now asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed cornices, eaves overhang first-floor walls.
- c. Dormers: All second-floor and attic windows on east and west elevations are dormers, many with gables, except two windows opening on loggia and two at south end of east elevation.

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C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Full basement extends under house except under northeast portion of present dining room (former front porch) and rear entry and former pantry. Storeroom is in southwest corner west of passage to steps and outside door. Water closet is in northeast corner near small darkroom. Rest of basement is open except for coal bins.
- b. First floor: Living room 13'-6" x 19' is in northwest corner of house, has fireplace set diagonally in northeast corner, sliding doors, leading to former dining room, now entrance hall-room, and single door in east wall leading to stair hall. Present entrance hall-room 13'-6" x 14' has fireplace flanked by doors to stair hall and kitchen on east wall, door to library on south wall beyond jog formed by large closet. Library has fireplace on east wall within large inglenook beyond ceiling beam, and door to enclosed pentagonal porch on west wall. Present dining room includes former porch and den areas in northeast corner of house. Pantry and stair hall doors are on south wall. South of stair hall is kitchen 13' x 14' and rear entry. Passage projecting in three-sided bay from east wall behind stairs connects kitchen with pantry.
- c. Second floor: Northwest chamber 14' x 16' has fireplace on east wall near north corner. Attic stairs are enclosed between northwest chamber and room 14' x 18' over entrance hall-room, with fireplace on east wall.

A bathroom and closet are between this room and southwest chamber, which has fireplace set diagonally, facing southwest in alcove with oriel. Northeast and southeast chambers have no fireplaces. Original bathroom is between southeast chamber and stair hall. All chambers have closets.

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- d. Attic: Pair of north rooms, stairs, middle room and bathroom on west side, south room, and storage areas on east side between northeast and south rooms comprise arrangement of attic. All spaces have sloping ceilings on east and/or west sides.
2. Stairways: Basement stairs under main staircase ascend in ten risers to landing on east wall and return four risers in opposite direction to enclosed space with doors opening into stair hall and kitchen. Lower flight of main staircase was originally open on north side, is now partially enclosed by pantry wall. Stairs ascend between kitchen and present dining room in nine risers to landing on east wall and return seven risers in opposite direction to second floor. Attic stairs have been relocated, ascend west in enclosed straight run.
3. Flooring: Narrow wooden strips, varnished.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster and wallpaper. Some first-floor rooms have paneled wainscoting.
5. Doorways and doors: Original entrance to den from stairhall was wide opening without doors. There are sliding doors between northwest parlor and original dining room, now entrance hall-room. First-floor doors have horizontal panels; second-floor doors have four vertical panels. Doorways have simple wooden molded architraves.
6. Decorative features and trim: Original dining room, now entrance hall-room, has paneled dado approximately five feet high. Wooden mantelpieces show early use of Neo-Colonial and Neo-Federal motifs. For original decoration and color schemes, see Supplemental Material above.
7. Notable hardware: None recorded.
8. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.
9. Heating: Six major rooms have fireplaces. Central hot water heating system has furnace labeled "Quiet Ballard Burner."

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: House is sited on embankment approximately 5' above sidewalk grade and faces north toward Bowdoin Street in quiet residential neighborhood near Western Promenade in Portland.
2. Enclosures: Wooden fence borders lot on east. Brick wall encloses service area.
3. Outbuildings: Wooden shingled two-car garage is placed in southeast quarter of lot.
4. Walks: Cement steps ascend embankment to cement walk on west side of house.
5. Landscaping: Large trees and shrubbery are arranged informally.

Prepared by Professor F. Blair Reeves, AIA
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
August 1965
and Denys Peter Myers
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
May 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Summer, 1965 Maine III Project by the HABS in association with the American Institute of Architects and financed by "Mission 66" funds of the National Park Service with assistance from a special fund raised by Ambrose C. Cramer, Preservation Officer, Maine Chapter, AIA. The Portland Museum of Art, John Pancoast, Director, provided office space. The project was under the direction of the Eastern Office of Design and Construction, Mr. James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect, and was supervised by Architect F. Blair Reeves, Professor of Architecture at the University of Florida, assisted by Jack E. Boucher, HABS photographer; Christopher Benninger, Sally Dana, Philip Goiran, and Davis Lee Jahncke, Student Assistant Architects and students at the University of Florida, Carnegie Institute of Technology, the University of Pennsylvania, and Tulane University, respectively; and Martha Kingsbury, Research Assistant and graduate student at Harvard University.

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